

Dear Public Health committee,

As the State of Connecticut considers eliminating the religious exemption for vaccinations, it is important that we, the undersigned rabbis and cantors, state our strong support for Senate Bill 568 AN ACT ELIMINATING THE NONMEDICAL EXEMPTION TO THE IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENT.

The tragic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the recent introduction of the vaccine have shown us once again the life-saving power of vaccination.

A long-established core value of our Torah and Jewish tradition is the importance of protecting and preserving our health, well-being and safety. We are obligated to do everything possible to protect life and are obligated to put the preservation of life above all other mitzvot (religious commandments).

In addition to the global impact of Covid-19, in recent years we have witnessed diseases once considered eradicated again harming children and families when vaccinations against them are not vigilantly performed. There is a clear Jewish religious obligation to protect the health of our own children and to protect others through vaccination. Moreover, there is no basis in Jewish law or tradition for exempting children from vaccination.

As evidenced by the strong statements in support made by the Orthodox Union, the largest Orthodox Jewish congregational organization in the United States, by the Rabbinical Council of America, the largest organization of Orthodox rabbis in North America, and by several community batei din (Jewish religious courts), **it is clear that vaccinations are not only permitted by Orthodox Jewish law, they are obligatory.**¹

The Conservative Movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) has ruled that timely vaccinations are "a basic and necessary requirement for appropriate pediatric care." Rabbi Joseph Prouser of the CJLS argues that "unless medically contraindicated for specific children, in extraordinary and compelling cases, parents have an unambiguous religious obligation to have their children immunized against infectious disease." The response concludes, "Failure to immunize children against vaccine-preventable disease is a serious, compound violation of Jewish Law: **there is no basis in Halakhah to support a parent's request for a religious exemption from state-mandated immunizations.**"²

Reform Judaism, too, holds that vaccination is mandatory. The Central Conference of American Rabbis, the professional organization of Reform Rabbis, issued a responsa (official rabbinic position) on Compulsory Immunization in 1999 which finds that vaccines qualify as *refu'ah bedukah*, proven remedies, and are therefore an obligation. The responsum states that "Jewish tradition would define immunization as part of the mitzvah of healing and recognize it as a required measure, since we are not entitled to endanger ourselves or the children for whom we are responsible by refusing proven medical treatment." The responsum clearly endorses "programs of compulsory immunization in our communities, with exemptions granted to those individuals whose medical conditions place them at particular risk of injury or untoward side effects. Aside from those individual cases, **there are no valid Jewish religious grounds to support the refusal to immunize as a general principle.**"³

Based on the authorities cited above, we strongly oppose the use of Jewish religious tradition as a justification for avoiding vaccination. We are disheartened that some Jews have cited a so-called "religious exemption" to evade their responsibility to vaccinate. We strenuously disagree with those

who have testified that vaccination conflicts with religious observance in any way of the Orthodox community. There is no basis at all in Judaism for any religious exemption. With our sincere wishes for good health upon all children in the State of Connecticut, and all of God's children everywhere,

Rabbi Michael S. Friedman, Temple Israel of Westport

Cantor Harriet Dunkerley, Temple B'nai Chaim, Georgetown, CT. (Reform)

Rabbi Michael Friedman, Temple Israel, Westport, CT (Reform)

Rabbi Jason Greenberg, Temple Shalom, Norwalk, CT (Reform)

Rabbi Marcelo Kormis, Congregation Beth El, Fairfield, CT. (Conservative)

Rabbi Danny Moss, Temple Israel, Westport, CT (Reform)

Rabbi Ita Paskind, Congregation Beth El, Norwalk, CT. (Conservative)

Rabbi Greg Wall, Beit Chaverim Synagogue, Westport, CT. (Orthodox)

Rabbi Jeremy Wiederhorn, TCS, Westport, CT (Conservative)

[Statement on Vaccinations from the OU and Rabbinical Council of America - Orthodox Union](#)

<https://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/general/1628509/vaad-harabbonim-rabbinical-council-of-baltimore-join-growing-list-of-rabbonim-urging-vaccination.html>

https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/20052010/prouser_immunization.pdf

<https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/nyp-no-5759-10/>